



McGREGOR W. SCOTT

*United States Attorney
Eastern District of California*

NEWS RELEASE

Sacramento
501 I Street, Suite 10-100
Sacramento, CA 95814
Tel 916/554-2700
TTY 916/554-2877

Fresno
2500 Tulare Street, Suite 4401
Fresno, CA 93721
Tel 559/497-4000
TTY 559/497-4500

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 22, 2008

Docket #: 06-CR-00234-LJO

Contact: Kimberly A. Sanchez

<http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/cae>

FIREARMS AND DRUG TRAFFICKING OFFENSES RESULT IN A SENTENCE OF MORE THAN 14 YEARS IMPRISONMENT

FRESNO—United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that LAWRENCE STEVEN CORTEZ, 31, of Fresno, was sentenced today by United States District Judge Lawrence J. O'Neill to 170 months imprisonment. The defendant pleaded guilty on October 19, 2007 to possessing a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking offense and possession of methamphetamine with the intent to distribute.

This case is the product of a joint investigation by the Fresno Methamphetamine Task Force, consisting of agents and officers from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the California Department of Justice Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement, the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the Fresno County Sheriff's Office, the California Highway Patrol, and the Fresno Police Department.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Kimberly Sanchez, who prosecuted this case, the charges resulted from a June 19, 2006 incident. Agents learned that the defendant was on parole with an active arrest warrant. They established surveillance at CORTEZ's residence and observed him engaging in what appeared to be sales of controlled substances. The agents arrested CORTEZ and found a loaded .40 caliber Sig Sauer handgun in his waistband, crystal methamphetamine packaged for sale in his pocket, a digital scale, plastic bags, a pay-owe sheet, and a cell phone. The defendant possessed the firearm to protect himself, his drugs and drugs proceeds, and he possessed the methamphetamine with the intent to sell it. The defendant had three prior convictions for controlled substance and firearms offenses from incidents occurring between 1999 and the present.

Judge O'Neill, in sentencing the defendant, said that given the defendant's criminal history along with the fact he was on parole at the time of this offense, a sentence of 170 months was appropriate.

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